

Queen Mary,
University of
London
Sikh Society



Annual Report 2010-2011

Queen Mary's Sikh Society promotes activities that appreciate the culture, history and ideology of the Sikh way of life

OUR OBJECTIVES

- Make Sikh Society bigger
- Create a more social environment to change perceptions of negativity related to conformism
- To use this environment to facilitate Sikh learning and practice for the majority
- Share Sikh principles, history and ideology in creative and interactive ways to engage members rather than talk at them
- Pay off an accumulated debt to the QM Student Union
- Network better with other societies

INTRODUCTION

Report from University Sikh society President 2010-2011

The year began with ambitious objectives which required a change in strategy and an experimental culture. Compared to other committees, we were rather small with large objectives.

A month into term, the original, elected President decided to resign due to personal circumstances which led to one of the two Vice Presidents, I, taking over the Presidency. To decide who would become the new President, the committee voted, and formal producers implemented by the Student Union were adhered to. This involved the paid members of the society also voting for the new President, which a month into the year, consisted of few members.

Over many years, the number of society members have gradually fallen which has been disheartening, especially as other societies reported rapid growth. Many people who did not attend events or the weekly sessions said it was down to the conformist perception of the society which made them feel isolated. Others were unaware that the society existed. With these negative perceptions among the community, we changed our strategy to create a social environment which would still communicate Sikhi using creative and innovative approaches. This placed a strong demand on us as it meant that each weekly session we had to develop new and interactive ways to engage and attract students. One of the biggest changes was the replacement of reciting Simran in our weekly sessions. Session activities ranged from quizzes to informal speakers, from talks presented by committee and society members to unstructured and informal discussions and a movie night. The underlining theme of all these activities was related to Sikh culture, ideology or history in some way which ensured that we continued

to promote Sikhi throughout. These ideas worked on a trial-and-error basis which we adjusted throughout the year once we discovered what did and did not work and where improvements could be made. We tried to provide snacks and drinks at the sessions to attract more students; this strategy disappeared due to struggles in finances. We managed to successfully create a sociable and friendly environment as well as an environment where students were able to share their opinions and were willing to listen to those who were more experienced or had more knowledge of Sikhi that they could share. This also fostered our unity and closeness as a society and developed relations.

To create awareness of our existence we made sure that we participated in events across the university; the inter-soc football tournament, an inter-faith event and events with other universities such as the Kings Football tournament and Collaborations 2.

We had inherited a large debt of £434.59 which had accumulated over the past six or seven years. One of our first objectives was to clear this debt to remove the burden and allow a clean slate for the committees to come. Our strategy to finance this debt was through increasing membership, entry charges to events, profit from the sale of Sikh society hoodys and donations via a donation box we had at all events.

We managed to have a successful year and overcome obstacles and difficulties that arose through dedication and commitment from not only the committee but society members who also saw our vision of improving the society and achieving the objectives. Support from Naujawani.com was a fundamental force that allowed the society to make progress. The result was a larger society that was built on close relations and allowed efficient sharing and promoting of Sikhi in a comfortable and informal environment.

MEMBERSHIP & OFFICERS

SELECTION PROCESS

The new committee for 2011-2012 was chosen by the President and Vice President. Society members were asked to show interest if they wanted to be part of the upcoming committee. We already had an idea of who was interested and what positions they would be most suited for.

As our society is quite tight-knit it was clear through weekly sessions and events which students would be willing, committed and enthusiastic to be part of the new committee and many had already showed interest before a formal announcement had been made.

Due to the small nature of our society we did not have a wide selection of members showing interest and we did struggle to fill extra roles which we decided to add such as a Barts Representative.

However, we managed to overcome these minor issues through our close relations within the society and members were more than willing to participate and join the committee even though they are not necessarily classed as part of the 'core' committee.

SOCIETY OFFICERS

Priya K Dawgotra - President
Satbir S Sandhu – Vice President
Pundeep K Dhillon - Treasurer
Dalvir S Soor – Marketing
Randeep S Samra – Football Co-ordinator

SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP

Number of paid members: 32
Average attendance for weekly sessions: 15
Average attendance for a general event: 22
Cost of membership: £5.00

STUDENT SERVICES

ACADEMIC STUDIES

The Sikh Studies Course offered by Naujawani.com had an excellent response with consistent attendance from the majority. We had 23 students register for the course and around 15 attended regularly. Preeti Dulay and Inderveer Khaira achieved 100% attendance from all the societies that held the course, which in my opinion exemplified their commitment and dedication, which was also shown during the year.



Harwinder Singh from Naujawani.com teaching

We were able to link issues from the Sikh Studies class to our weekly sessions. This encouraged students from the class to attend the weekly sessions and vice versa which led to some students attending the Sikh Studies Class for one or two lessons to gain an insight of the classes. I am sure that the classes will continue to be successful and I am positive that students from QM will be more than willing and eager to attend them in the upcoming year.



Some members at the Sikh Studies Class

WORKSHOPS

Table, Punjabi and Gurbani workshops did exist previously but were not carried out this year due to lack of interest.

ASSISTANCE

As mentioned, financially the society has had a deficit account since around 2006 and one of our aims this year was to clear this. Numerous attempts were made to contact and find sponsorship which we had difficulty in doing.

Naujawani.com was more than ready to help and contributed heavily towards paying off the deficit with a large donation of £119.00. This was the original figure given by the Student Union but was later found to be incorrect and amended to £434.59. Not only did Naujawani.com support us financially, but showed us support throughout the year once they were aware of the unfortunate decrease in members over the years and the lack of grounding that we had. We were able to contact Naujawani.com regarding any issues such as events or ideas, which we did regarding a Dinner and Dance that we wanted to undertake with the Hindu Society. For all the contribution and help, we are genuinely thankful.



Some members at our weekly session

ACTIVITIES

SPORT

We participated in the QM inter-soc Football Tournament where we came in at second place. We participated in the Kings Football Tournament where many society members attended to support the team and event.



The QMSS football team

ARTS

We collectively attended a Dinner and Dance hosted by QM Hindu Society which served no alcohol or meat. We supported the event by helping to sell tickets. The money raised from the event went to Whitechapel Mission.

We attended the Turban Exhibition at the British Museum at the end of the year which was received enthusiastically by everyone.

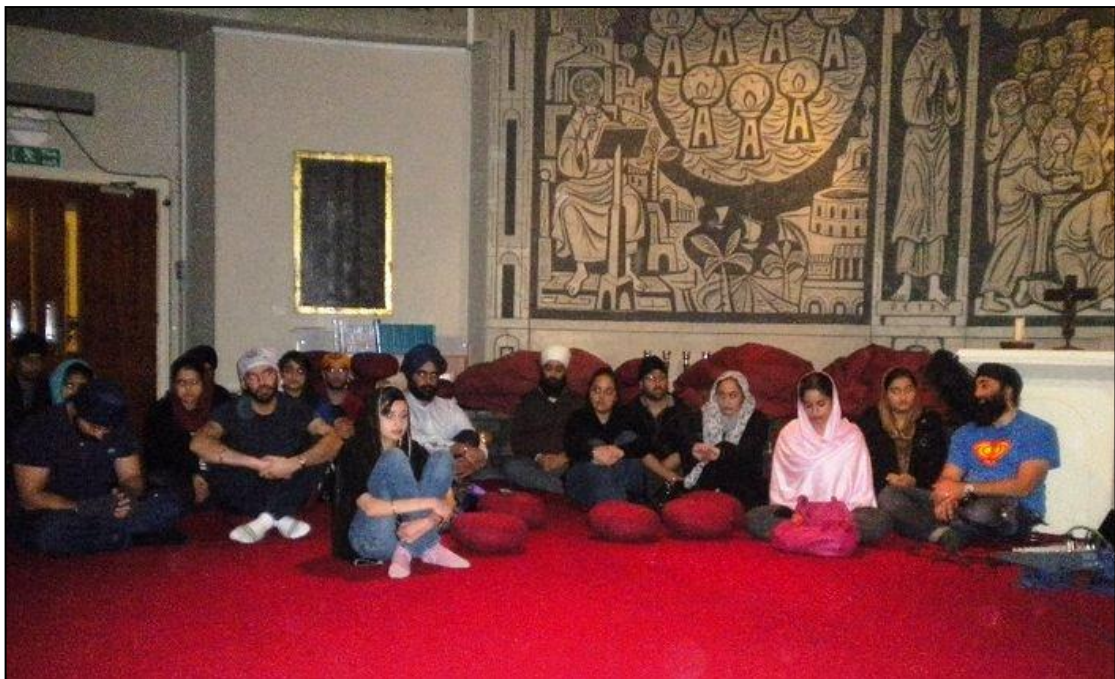


Society members having viewed the exhibition

WELL-BEING

At the beginning of the year we held the first ever Sewa Day designed to give out free food to everyone. This was to highlight the giving and sharing element of Sikhi that we wanted to promote not only within our society but to the wider communities also.

We held our regular Kirtan Jam in December which allowed students to relax through the spiritual and calming environment. We had Kirtan performed by students and adults alike and a projector with Sikhi to the Max translations to aid understanding. The Kirtan Jam was an important event this year because we did not have Simran in our weekly sessions so this event bought the spirituality element to the societies activities.



Students listening to Kirtan

SOCIAL LIFE

FRESHERS WEEK

Our aim during Freshers week was to promote a friendly and sociable attitude towards anyone that showed an interest at our stall. In the past we have not had many students approach the society so this year we tried very hard to create a positive and welcoming scene. We understood how students had negative feelings towards the society from a misconception that the society preaches or forces a certain way of living.

We bought a banner and used balloons to make our stall stand out. We offered pakora and lollipops to attract passersby and draw attention. We had music playing from a laptop by artists such as Sukhshinder Shinda from his album Satguru Mera. We stayed away from playing Simran and Kirtan as unfortunately some students would associate this with being too traditional.



We made questionnaires that we asked students to fill in as they signed up to the society. The questionnaires were designed to find out what students wanted to see from their Sikh society – what they would like to see from their weekly sessions, which classes/workshops they would be interested in and events they would like to attend. One of our goals was to cater for majority interest rather than engage in activities which would only attract those Sikhs who were already embraced the Sikh way of life. We used the upcoming QM inter-soc football tournament to encourage the boys to sign up.

Of the students that showed interest, regardless of whether they became paid members, their name, number and e-mail address was noted and they were encouraged to add or join the Qmul friend/group on Facebook. The mobile numbers proved to be useful as this was one of the main modes of communication throughout the year.

CELEBRATIONS

The annual Cha & Somosa Party with entertainment from Magic Singh was an event that allowed students to meet other society members.



Students at the event



Magic Singh performing

Annual Dinner took place at the end of the year at Punjab where the upcoming committee was announced.



Outside Punjab after our Annual Dinner

Events such as Gurpurbs and Bandi Chor were marked by talks and discussions.

EXCURSIONS

At the beginning of the year, we collectively attended a Dinner and Dance hosted by the Hindu society – 20 attended.

We collectively attended the Turban Exhibition at the British Museum towards the end of the year – 15 attended.

Collaborations 2 – 8 attended.

CAMPAIGNS & EVENTS

MAJOR EVENT

Sewa Day was an event that had not been held previously and had been discussed by the previous President. The aim of the event was to provide free food to everyone at the university to raise awareness of the giving and sharing nature of Sikhi as well as to promote a positive stance within the university. We wanted to hold the event within the first 2 weeks of term to help students that had just moved to campus and had to cook for themselves.

We used the local Gurdwara in Bow to prepare and make the food, which were very helpful and supportive of the whole event. We bought the ingredients and had sewadars from the society to help out. At that time, as it was the beginning of the year, the society was rather small so we relied on close friends and sewadars at the Gurdwara to help prepare the food.



Students doing Sewa; preparing food



Serving food

We transferred the food to campus the next day to a central location where students came and would be served the food (similar to the Gurdwara Langar giving structure). Students were guided to information about Sikhi that had been posted around the room.

Overall the event managed to be a success, just about! Due to the last minute planning, the lack of marketing limited our success. The event was not advertised widely and so did not achieve maximum attendance.



Happy students enjoying the free food

However, a positive outcome from the event was a link that has been made with the local Gurdwara. I think this support should be sustained and developed which would be ideal for both parties. On numerous occasions students that live on campus have enquired about a local Gurdwara and Bow is ideal. The society can also use the facilities at the Gurdwara if need be in future and I am certain that the Gurdwara will be willing to help.

ACTIVISM

None.

COMMUNICATING WITH STUDENTS

MODES

We initially used colourful, attractive posters to communicate major events. However they ended up being more of a hassle rather than helpful! There were bureaucratic issues regarding where the posters could be placed around campus and the requirement for them to be stamped and approved by the Student Union. Facebook was the easiest mode: we would send out weekly messages to inform everyone of the theme of the session that week. We would update the status regularly and uploaded photos to encourage people to participate and illustrate the sociable environment. We also used the status to communicate Gurbani: every week we would have a 'quote of the week' which we would try to relate to the session which integrated Gurbani into our sessions in an indirect way. We would also send out information regarding marked Sikh events such as Gurburbs with condensed and summarized information of the meaning behind the event. From the Freshers fayre we collected everyone's mobile numbers and we would send a text weekly regarding the session and any events or meet-ups we had planned. This was effective as some people do not always read their Facebook messages so this enabled us to reach those students too.

We would use the official Sikh Soc Google mail account to highlight major upcoming events and to mark special Sikh events. We did not use this channel of communication to market or promote the weekly sessions as we didn't want people to consider it to be 'junk'. Furthermore the contact list includes graduated students some of which may still be interested to attend major events such as the Kirtan Jam.

PARTNERSHIPS

WITHIN QUEEN MARY

Within the university we participated in an inter-faith games show event hosted by the Muslim Medics and Dentists Association, which allowed us to connect with the Barts Christian Fellowship and QM Atheist. Not only did it allow us to inform others of basic Sikh principles through the game show but also show our willingness of working and networking with other societies and promoted an inter-faith environment which has only recently commenced at Queen Mary.



Team & supporters that attended the game show

As mentioned we supported the Hindu Soc with their Dinner and Dance event which allowed us to form a connection with them. On some occasions we had Hindu Soc members attend our weekly sessions to increase their knowledge of Sikhi and vice versa.

NATIONAL BODY

We did not request any help from any National Body. We would have liked to have requested help but at the time of year it was too late for us to enquire.

EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

As touched on throughout this report, Naujawani.com was a strong and dedicated support that allowed us to maximise our potential this year. Not only

did they help us to achieve a positive cash flow but provided advice on many levels and helped us work with what we had rather than be too ambitious immediately. For this, we are truly grateful.

Bow Gurdwara allowed us to prepare food for Sewa Day and provided facilities and support. This is a rather new connection which I hope will be built on as the Gurdwara is very local and can provide help and benefit mutually.

FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

SUMMARY

We were very pleased to discover that our deficit had been cleared and we had achieved a positive balance of £8.50 for the first time in years. For this to happen some expenses made by the committee were unable to be reimbursed. However, we were more than happy to accept this as we knew that one of our main objectives had been achieved.

ACCOUNTS

Unfortunately at this time we were unable to get hold of any account details.

THE FUTURE

In short, the risk paid off: the risk of straying away from path dependency and thinking 'outside the box'. The experimental approach that we took this year allowed us to discover creative and innovative ways that were able to facilitate the learning and practice of Sikhi as well as maintaining the sociable and friendly environment that we wanted to create.

Many of our shortcomings were related to lack of planning and time. We were very enthusiastic to achieve our objectives that led us to occasionally act on short notice which limited the success of some events namely Sewa Day. With efficient planning and coordination, events would run with ease and would serve to create better morale within the committee and society.

I would encourage the upcoming committee to continue on this creative path and ensure that activities and events are undertaken that suit the majority rather than minority; as mentioned before the society needs to include everyone rather than favour those who have already adopted the way of Sikhi. This facilitates the sharing of knowledge and learning between students and removes any negative barriers between those who are religious and those who are about to set foot on the path of Sikhi.

In order to continue the success, I believe links and relations within and outside the university need to be developed and maintained namely with, Naujawani.com, Bow Gurdwara and other London Sikh Societies.



Students from London Sikh Socs that attended the Turban Exhibition